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(U) CHINA: SOCIAL TRENDS SINCE THE DEATH OF MAO

BUREAU OF  
INTELLIGENCE  
AND RESEARCH

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Summary

Chinese society has been undergoing a major transformation that one observer in the late 1970s characterized as "coming alive." Since Mao Zedong's death in 1976, relationships among the society, political system, and individual have altered significantly. Under Deng Xiaoping, life in China is becoming less politicized and more pluralistic. Although the political system is still authoritarian, rigid central planning is giving way to a somewhat mixed industrial economy and household-based agriculture. Many aspects of social and cultural life are becoming more autonomous and diverse. Individuals and groups now have and exercise a wider, albeit still limited, range of choice on "non-political" questions.

But the question of whether or to what extent relative social and cultural autonomy can coexist in China with denial of political freedom is yet to be answered. Such a combination exists, if uneasily, in many non-communist authoritarian regimes and to some extent in Yugoslavia and Hungary. Chinese pragmatism and traditional Chinese political culture also suggest that such a dichotomy is possible.

Continued success of the economic reforms is probably the key to China's continued development of a more pluralistic social and intellectual life. The reformers argue that greater pluralism and autonomy are essential for rapid and sustained economic growth; China's demonstrable economic achievement vindicates their approach to modernization. Conversely, if the economy falters, pressure to curtail social and cultural autonomy will increase. But the reforms have already--perhaps irreversibly--altered life in the People's Republic of China.

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**CONFIDENTIAL**

- ii -

China is beginning to resemble a "consumer society." Increasingly, Chinese are demanding higher quality goods and a better, more varied diet. Greater economic activity has led to greater geographic mobility; internal travel is now occurring at unprecedented levels, and a domestic tourism industry is beginning to develop.

With the more relaxed political atmosphere and the upsurge in economic activity has come a dramatic increase in the spread of information. As this trend continues--especially as the computer age arrives in China--the leadership may increasingly feel threatened by the opening of channels of information difficult for them to control.

The spread of information may already be exacerbating the problem of political alienation within a large segment of Chinese youth. New non-political opportunities for personal advancement, the breakdown of ideology, and exposure to foreign ideas and science are leading many young people in China to question everything, including the prevailing political system.

Some of the traditional mechanisms of social control are facing change. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its youth adjunct, the Communist Youth League, are having trouble recruiting China's outstanding candidates. Alternative paths of upward mobility, together with added burdens and diminished benefits of party membership, make it more difficult for the party to attract the kind of people needed to provide effective leadership in the drive for modernity. This tension between the need for high-quality political leadership and the alternative opportunities for China's most promising young people will likely intensify over the next two decades.

At the same time, however, the regime's coercive apparatus remains intact--as the current crackdown on crime attests--although it is now somewhat more selective in the behavior it seeks to control and somewhat more constrained to operate within the framework of China's growing legal system. The preoccupation with personal goals and material possessions suggests that disaffection can be controlled, but development of future political leadership will require positive measures--possibly including the expansion of political participation by intellectuals--rather than simply less intrusive coercion.

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Depoliticization of Daily Life

For a hypothetical observer revisiting China for the first time since the late Mao period, one of the most noticeable changes would be the widening of areas of autonomy from political interference. Among the most obvious differences are the reemergence of colorful dress and varied hairstyles and the return to acceptability of such non-political pastimes as raising caged songbirds, practicing traditional opera or martial arts, playing bridge, and displaying flowers in the home. Western habits and customs have gained some currency under the encouragement of Deng, party chief Hu Yaobang, and Premier Zhao Ziyang. Top leaders, most noticeably Hu and Zhao, now often appear in public wearing Western-style suits and ties; and China's press has discussed at length the relative merits and disadvantages of traditional Chinese communal eating habits and utensils.

On a more serious level, political control and ideological "education" are far less pervasive today than a decade ago. Political meetings at the workplace are less frequent and less intrusive. People feel freer to absent themselves from political meetings or to exercise their "right" to silence. Academic debate, even on issues of current policy relevance, are commonplace and appear not only in obscure scholarly journals but also in such prestigious national newspapers as Guangming Ribao (Enlightenment Daily), Jingji Ribao (Economic Daily), and even Renmin Ribao (People's Daily), the party's official mouthpiece.

Accompanying the freer atmosphere in the discussion of contemporary issues has been a widespread effort to set the historical record straight. Beginning with the 1981 party historical resolution--an attempt to assess Mao's contributions and faults--this effort has gained measurably through Deng's success in forcing party elders to retire. As a result, hundreds of memoirs and reminiscences have been published over the past five years, many with new insights into crucial events and important personalities in recent Chinese history.

Perhaps the most striking reassessment, aside from the official verdict on Mao, is the recent treatment of former Defense Minister and CCP Vice Chairman Lin Biao. Lin allegedly died after failing in an attempted assassination/coup against Mao in 1971. After more than a decade as the archetypical negative example, Lin is now being viewed as someone who made significant contributions during the war against Japan and the civil war.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

Despite the more relaxed intellectual and political atmosphere, the Chinese leadership has continued to use political "education" and indoctrination to enforce its priorities and ideological viewpoint. The abortive 1983-84 "spiritual pollution" campaign, unleashed by Deng, was first used by party conservatives to attack many reform initiatives. Later, party reformers rechanneled the issues raised by the campaign into a less disruptive, more positively formulated, but no less ambitious effort to foster the implementation of their view of a "spiritual civilization" in China, uphold Marxism-Leninism, and enforce party leadership. Similarly, the three-year party rectification campaign begun in 1983 has as its goal not downgrading ideology but enforcing the current leadership's interpretation of it.

#### Shifting Focus of Loyalty and Identity

Despite the leadership's continuing efforts to enforce loyalty to party-defined goals, one of the most significant, if somewhat less visible, changes in Chinese society during the last decade has been a progressive shift in the individual citizen's focus of loyalty and identity. Under Mao, the only focus of permissible ambitions was to be a "Lei Feng"--a willing tool of the party and of socialism who renounced personal ambitions in order to further the goals of society as espoused by the current CCP leadership.

Under Deng's economic reforms, however, the focus of permissible ambitions has widened to include such personal goals as wealth, education, and travel overseas. Indeed, the leadership has made a calculated shift to material incentives in order to increase economic productivity and has appealed to the public's desire for a higher standard of living.

With these shifts in incentives and permissible goals has come a change in self-identification. Increasingly, citizens appear to be identifying themselves with a profession or career rather than with a danwei (work unit); control of the workplace over all aspects of the employee's life has diminished. Greater opportunities for employment outside state channels, the expansion of privately owned housing, the appearance of privately and collectively operated services, and greater labor mobility for skilled workers and intellectuals have slowly loosened the stranglehold of the danwei over its employees.

This development, of course, will bring with it a significant reduction in the certainty of life, the paternalism of socialist China. One of the most common complaints of the Chinese living in the West is the feeling that no one is concerned about them and that no one will take care of them. As the darwei loses its control only to be replaced by other social mechanisms, Chinese

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

are likely to experience increasing frustration, alienation, even urban anomie.

In the rural areas, the encouragement of a "family responsibility system" seems to have shifted the focus of personal loyalty away from higher levels of collective organization--the production team, brigade, and commune--back to the nuclear family. While this development undoubtedly has had beneficial side effects, it has also created problems. One difficulty has been assuring universal primary school enrollment and such other social services as health care, welfare support for the needy, and maintenance of local transportation and water conservation infrastructure--in the past showpieces for the success of socialism in China.

In addition, the renewed importance of the family to farming may have exacerbated such traditional problems as family disputes over land rights and the reemergence of "feudal" traditional practices, including exorbitant dowries and child engagements. Some observers believe that the premium on farm labor power combined with stringent government controls on population growth has sometimes led to ill treatment of girl children, even occasional infanticide. Moreover, in a climate of increasing rural affluence, officials have found economic pressure less than effective in controlling the rural birthrate, sometimes leading them to resort to more overtly coercive measures to enforce government family planning policy.

#### Improving Standards of Living and Emerging Consumerism

One of China's most successful efforts since Mao's death has been the raising of income and consumption levels. According to a recent speech by Politburo member and Vice Premier Tian Jiyun, the average annual income of urban workers rose from 762 yuan in 1980 to 1,176 yuan in 1985, an annual growth of 4.7 percent in real terms. Rural income during the same period grew from 191 yuan to 400 yuan, an annual increase of 14 percent after inflation. Moreover, according to Tian, the proportion of rural families at the high end of the income spectrum increased while the proportion of low-income households dropped and the income gap between peasants and workers narrowed.

Top reform economist Xue Muqiao recently gave even more impressive figures. Between 1978 and 1984, according to Xue, the retail price index rose 17.7 percent and the index of employees' living expenses increased 19.9 percent. Foodstuffs grew more rapidly, at 26.9 percent the fastest growing expense for most consumers. Over the same period of time, however, average urban and rural disposable income went up 57.7 percent in real terms. Savings deposits also grew rapidly, expanding from 30.9 billion yuan in 1978 to 114.9 billion yuan in 1984, a 372-percent jump.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 4 -

Increased income has improved the diet of most Chinese. In the 1978-84 period, average consumption of grain increased 28.6 percent; use of cooking oil tripled; and pork consumption increased 70 percent. Dietary variety and quality have improved as well, even though consumption of animal protein remains very low by international standards. Plant foods still account for 94 percent of China's food consumption, according to official statistics, and the nutritional intake of as many as 12.2 percent of urban families falls below international standards for maintaining normal health.

Rising incomes have allowed more and more Chinese, both urban and rural, to enjoy some of the amenities of life. Between 1978 and 1984, for example, the number of bicycles per 100 residents rose 144 percent; ownership of radios, 177 percent; and televisions, 460 percent. Increasingly, Chinese consumers are looking for more expensive consumer durables and demanding higher quality--even foreign-made--products. Washing machines, radios, tape recorders, color televisions, and refrigerators have replaced bicycles, wrist watches, electric fans, and sewing machines in the purchasing plans of consumers as yesterday's luxuries increasingly become today's commonplace items.

Urbanization and Geographic Mobility

One of China's greatest successes during Mao's 30-year rule was its control of migration to major cities. Except for brief periods during the late 1950s and early 1960s, the movement of the rural population was strictly controlled. One result, however, has been that many of China's 800 million rural dwellers are seriously underemployed.

Under Deng's economic reforms, the leadership now envisions a new strategy for dealing with the "excess" population in the countryside. The intention still is to limit strictly migration into the large eastern seaboard cities but to encourage the growth of small and medium-sized cities throughout the country and to foster economic interaction between town and countryside. Already some 60 million peasants have left farming for non-agricultural employment, mostly in the rural areas or small cities. Some Chinese estimate that as many as two-thirds of the nation's rural dwellers--perhaps 500 million people--will eventually abandon farming for local industry or service trades.

In the urban setting, opportunities to change jobs, even to relocate across the country, are growing but still limited. If current reforms succeed, however, something of a job market may emerge, with intellectuals and skilled workers able to sell their expertise to the most attractive bidder.

At the same time, the dramatic expansion of economic activity during the last decade has led to a surge in internal travel.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 5 -

Transportation lines are strained, forcing reforms in the airline industry and prompting increased investment in the rail system and water transport. Buyers and sellers now travel all across China attempting to market their wares, find a cheaper or more reliable supplier, or act as middleman or matchmaker. Higher income levels have also led to a dramatic increase in internal tourism, creating both demand and opportunity for developing hotels and tourist facilities and services.

Spread of Information

One consequence of the relaxation of pervasive political control has been a dramatic increase in the availability and variety of information. China's rising living standard has led not only to skyrocketing demand for television sets but also to a concomitant demand for more and better programming. In 1983, Beijing decided that one way to meet this demand was to break up China Central Television's (CCTV) monopoly on broadcasting. Under a "four-tier" system, provinces, prefectures, and counties are encouraged to supplement CCTV's coverage. The leadership announced plans to expand the number of television stations from 44 in 1983 to more than 245. By 1985, 104 stations--91 of them provincially operated--were in operation, with more springing up all the time. CCTV also plans to add another channel to its current three.

This rapid expansion apparently has produced a great variation in the quality of programming. In Beijing, more than half of total air time is devoted to sports, drama, music, dance, children's programming, and other entertainment, according to a 1985 survey. Educational programs took up 24 percent of the broadcast day, and news accounted for 15 percent. CCTV has put together a number of very popular and well-produced programs including the highly acclaimed "Four Generation Family," a 28-episode serial broadcast during the summer of 1985.

In order to raise the quality and interest level of its programs, CCTV has also imported a number of foreign programs. Since 1982, six American television companies have agreed to provide programs to CCTV, including CBS which sold 64 hours of programming ranging from "Dr. Seuss" cartoons and "60 Minutes" to sports shows in exchange for advertising time.

Local programming, however, is neither as well produced nor as rigidly controlled as broadcasting in major cities. One result is that viewers tune in foreign broadcasts when possible. Another is that in the effort to build up their "ratings," local stations have begun to broadcast what the market demands, even if it is not always completely in line with what propaganda officials in Beijing favor. According to a recent official investigation, 21 of 22 weekend programs on seven local stations were made in Hong Kong or Japan.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 6 -

At the same time that Chinese are watching more and better television programming, they are reading more and from a wider variety of sources. The number of newspapers and magazines published at and above the prefectural level increased from 69 to 340 between 1978 and 1983, and the number of magazines published jumped from 930 in 1978 to 3,415 by the end of 1983. Most of the new publications are not officially subsidized and must rely on sales to pay for their operations--advertising is still in its infancy. As a result, many of the non-official print media outlets provide the lively reporting on domestic and international news demanded by the public and the technical and professional information sought by a populace intent on improving its educational and professional status.

One result of this proliferation of channels of information has been the loss of readership by such official media outlets as People's Daily. Subscriptions to national newspapers fell by 5 percent in 1985. People's Daily circulation was down 8.6 percent, with Liberation Army Daily--the military's official organ--losing 9 percent of its subscribers. Surprisingly, even the intellectual-oriented Guangming Daily and the prestigious Economic Daily lost subscribers, 17.6 percent and 6.9 percent, respectively. Of the major national dailies, only China Daily--published in English--posted a gain, 6 percent. Major official magazines--including the party's Red Flag, the Communist Youth League's Chinese Youth, and the influential Liaowang (Outlook)--dropped by rates of 3 to 18 percent.

Another and potentially even more far-reaching aspect of the spread of information has been increased access to foreign information, foreign ideas, and foreign travel. Many of China's non-official publications concentrate on international events; and CCTV, under agreements with foreign broadcasters, now shows news clips from the British Broadcasting Corporation and American networks on its nightly newscasts. The economic "open door" has led to a massive influx of foreigners, both tourists and business people, with the result being much greater exposure in urban China to foreign ideas. At the same time, more and more Chinese are traveling abroad on business or for education, and even some private travel for pleasure is taking place.

Social Differentiation and Increased Social Complexity

Despite official disclaimers, many Chinese and some foreign observers fear that the current policy of "allowing some to become rich first" is leading to expanding income and status disparities both locally and regionally. Hard evidence has yet to be accumulated to address meaningfully the question of whether China's emphasis on coastal development, for example, is widening the gap between the coast, the interior, and the traditionally backward far west. But the Chinese press has discussed the issue

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 7 -

extensively, suggesting that the leadership is aware that perceptions of growing disparities may be as important as the reality.

Similarly, party conservatives have sounded warnings that current policies have the potential for polarizing communities as some get rich quicker than others. Last year, party theoretician Hu Qiaomu, for example, decried excessive publicity of "10,000-yuan" households, saying that they represented only a fraction of 1 percent of rural families while many households remained in poverty. Subsequently, publicity on China's rural nouveaux riches was trimmed back and top leaders--including Deng and Hu Yaobang--reassured the country that current reforms would not lead to polarization. At the same time, Chinese media have been replete with warnings to local officials not to exploit those who raise their standard of living by hard work and have called on local cadres to curb the excessive use of irregular, often illegal, levies on well-to-do families for support of schools, local industry, or social welfare programs.

The recent slowdown protest by Beijing municipal bus drivers over the higher income and better working conditions of the city's taxi drivers is suggestive of the extent and sensitivity of the "red eye disease" (envy) as a factor in contemporary Chinese society. A recent reminder in the pages of Guangming Daily that class struggle remains alive and well under socialism demonstrates the political potential of the issue of a reemerging class structure.

#### Youth Alienation and Questioning

Greater economic and social activity in the post-Mao era has also led to greater social complexity. New avenues of personal advancement are now open outside the traditional paths of party, military, or government service. Enterprising youth often look to higher education, foreign training, and business as ways to get ahead without the problems of political activism. Many are shunning membership in the Communist Youth League and CCP--formerly the sine qua non of upward mobility--in favor of developing a career. Many are reportedly even considering joining the minority, non-communist "democratic parties" as a way to be included in the political process without having to face the disadvantages of communist party discipline and study.

The regime's effort to undermine Mao's ideological legacy--without being able to replace it with something more concrete and positive than calls for "Chinese-style socialism" and the development of "spiritual civilization"--has left youth in an ideological vacuum. Many now feel free to question authority, even to attempt to find their own answers. A large, if unspecifiable, proportion of young people has been turned off altogether by the official dogma and the regime. Some had hopes for greater

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 8 -

intellectual freedom--even movement toward political reform--under Deng and Hu Yaobang... The regime's emphasis on party control, however, has left them cynical and bitter. Recent demonstrations suggest that many educated youth are also disillusioned by official corruption and nepotism, disturbed by the side effects of recent economic reforms, and concerned by unwelcome aspects of the "open door" policy.

Changes in Social Control Mechanisms and Breakdown of Order.

The mechanisms of social control also have been changing since Mao's time. Some of them, such as the Communist Youth League and the party itself, appear to have been weakened. With other avenues for upward mobility and recurrent campaigns against corruption by party members, the prestige of the political vanguard has suffered and its ability to enforce party discipline has apparently diminished. At the same time, other mechanisms of social control have been strengthened. For example, under the "responsibility system" in the countryside, the family has reemerged as the key unit of social and economic solidarity.

The regime's mainstay of social control, the security apparatus, has probably been neither weakened nor strengthened but has changed its approach somewhat. Security organs are now more selective in what behavior they seek to control. They more often are constrained to operate within the framework of the legal system. They are becoming more professional, better trained, and better equipped.

Security forces also face a changing set of problems. With the influx of foreigners and greater mobility, Chinese police now have increased problems with espionage, drug smuggling, embezzlement, and organized criminal activities. Scattered evidence suggests that one of the least welcome side effects of the more relaxed atmosphere in post-Mao China has been a dramatic increase in violent crime, burglary, and theft.

During 1985 more than 55,000 people were sentenced for crimes involving corruption, fraud, and theft, and the number of cases dealing with economic crimes handled by the judicial system increased by 32 percent over 1984. In the city of Shanghai alone, some 4,800 were arrested on charges of gambling. A staggering 110,000 were given "serious education" for the same offense during a recent crackdown. Municipal officials say they broke up 69 gambling syndicates and 153 gambling dens, seizing \$36,500 during the sweep. Nationwide, police since 1983 have arrested and charged more than 150,000 people for various crimes and broken up 130,000 criminal gangs, according to the new public security minister.

In the first three weeks of January 1986, at least 20 criminals were executed in Beijing alone, two of them for armed robbery

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 9 -

of a taxi driver from whom they took less than \$20. These are reportedly only the latest of thousands of executions over the past two years for crimes ranging from embezzlement to murder. Recent speeches by such top party officials as General Secretary Hu, Vice Premier Tian, Military Commission Permanent Vice Chairman Yang Shangkun, and Secretariat member Wang Zhaoguo suggest that many more will be brought before the bar--and some before the firing squad--before the end of 1986.

Momentum for the crackdown on crime appears to have gained a boost with the revelation of a major scandal in Fujian last year involving the production and sale of fake medicine. Conservative opponents of the "open door" especially seem to have made use of this and similar cases to call for greater attention to social order. They have apparently been helped by a rising crime rate. Complete statistics are not yet available, but in the capital the crime rate rose in 1985 to 7.8 reported crimes per 10,000 people from only 6.2 per 10,000 the year before. The low crime rate in 1984--the rate was officially listed as 11.7 in 1983--was largely the result of a major crackdown in late 1983 which carried over into 1984.

Speeches at the January 3-6, 1986, conference of 8,000 top cadres suggest that the leadership is seriously concerned about rampant embezzlement, bribery, and fraud as well as violent crime. The Secretariat has set up a new body under the leadership of Qiao Shi--newly a Politburo member and since last year head of the party's Politics and Law Commission--to examine discipline in all top party, government, and military bodies. Qiao apparently is already moving to consolidate his influence in this effort. The commission issued a joint circular with the Central Discipline Inspection Commission in mid-January which called for localities to "strike heavily" at economic criminals. In early January, another joint circular--this one by the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Communications--called for improved enforcement of "public order" in port cities. It was aimed at curbing bribery, smuggling, rowdiness by foreign seamen, and prostitution.

With security forces largely taxed by the increased rate of crime, the party has taken on a major role in attempting to curb corruption. More often than not, cases of embezzlement, bribery, and malfeasance are exposed by the national or local party discipline inspection commissions, not by the police. In many cases, discipline is meted out through the party rather than the courts.

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